

Son of God Movie



Review and Critique

By Justin Peters – March 2014

www.justinpeters.org

Ten years after Mel Gibson's movie, "The Passion of the Christ," we have another blockbuster film portraying the second Person of the triune God. This movie, "Son of God," shares more in common with its predecessor than simply the main character. Like "The Passion," "Son of God" has Roman Catholics (husband and wife team of Mark Burnett and Roma Downey) as its producers and is being enthusiastically embraced and promoted by evangelicals.

Once it comes out on DVD, "Son of God" will be sold in many secular stores, and undoubtedly every Christian bookstore. LifeWay Christian Stores, affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention, is already selling a Bible study authored by Rick Warren based on the film.¹ Knowing that this movie is going to be the topic of considerable conversation for some time, I went to see it with pen and notepad in hand to be able to offer my biblical/theological reflections.

I am no film critic and so will not comment one way or the other about cinematography, acting, musical score, etc. as I have no knowledge much less any expertise in such matters. This review will pertain to matters of historical and theological biblical accuracy. I have seen the movie once and did my best to take notes on as much as I possibly could. What follows is not – by a long shot – a comprehensive list of the problems with "Son of God" but does hit some of the more egregious ones.

Peter, let's change the world!

The problems with the movie began with the very first scene. The opening scene is that of Jesus calling Peter as his disciple. The biblical account records Jesus calling both Peter and Andrew his brother at the Sea of Galilee followed shortly thereafter with James and John.² In the movie, it is only Peter who is called. This is the first of what, I believe, are many nods to the Roman Catholic Church and its heretical theology.³

The Jesus character, played by Diogo Morgado, waded out into the water toward Peter in his boat and Peter pulled him in. Jesus said, “Just give me an hour and I will give you a whole new life” to which Peter replied, “Who says I want one?” Jesus said “I’m giving you the chance to change your life.” “What are we going to do?” asked Peter. Jesus answered, “Change the world.”



Firstly, none of these statements is in Scripture. The statement Jesus actually did make, “Come, follow me and I will make you fishers of men” (Matt. 4:19) was left out entirely. Notice, too, the horizontal nature of the statements from the Jesus character in the film: “I’m giving *you* the chance to change *your* life” and “change the world.” This reflects the entire tone of the film. It is horizontally rather than vertically oriented. Rather than focusing on the Person and work of Jesus reconciling sinful man to the righteous and holy God, the movie is focused on meeting people’s and society’s “felt” needs. This is not surprising given that the men chosen by Burnett and Downey to be the film’s theological advisors are the seeker-sensitive Rick Warren and Word-Faith preachers Joel Osteen and T.D. Jakes, the latter of whom is anti-Trinitarian.⁴

In an interview Burnett and Downey did with Oprah Winfrey, the latter refers to the main character, Diogo Morgado, as “hot Jesus,” in reference to what some, apparently, believe to be his good looks.⁵ As I watched the movie I was struck by how warm and fuzzy the Jesus character was. Almost touchy-feely. He struck me as, well, a hippie. And so rather than referring to him as Jesus, which I am most uncomfortable doing, I will heretofore refer to him as Hippie Jesus.

Tax Collector and his Blessed Life Now

The ordering of events in this movie is the chronological equivalent of a game of Pickup Sticks. The events of nearly every scene were either out of order or spliced together with portions of completely separate events. The account of Matthew, the tax collector, being called (Matt. 9:9-13) is just one such example. In the film Hippie Jesus calls Matthew to be his disciple. As the scene closed, Hippie Jesus paraphrases the real Jesus’ statement from a totally separate event recorded in Luke 18:9-14, specifically, that of the Pharisee and the tax collector.

The Bible records the unnamed tax collector (erroneously identified as Matthew in the film) as humbling himself, acknowledging his sin, and crying to God for mercy. Jesus said of this man that he “went to his house justified” (Luke 18:14). Hippie Jesus said of Matthew, “God blessed the tax collector, not the Pharisee.” Not only is this a mangling and juxtaposition of biblical events, notice the horizontal bent. The takeaway from the scene in the movie is not that the tax collector went away justified before a holy God as the real Jesus clearly stated, but that he was simply “blessed.”

Mary, Mary Bold and Daring

Mary Magdalene was prominently featured in the film. She is depicted as being in the boat with the other disciples as Hippy Jesus calls Peter to walk on the water. She rebukes and corrects the other *male* disciples (So much for the Apostle Paul's Holy Spirit inspired directive of 1 Timothy 2:12). She is at the crucifixion scene and is the only one brave enough to defend (Hippy) Jesus. She is also the first at the scene at the empty tomb. Seemingly her faith is stronger and she is bolder than anyone else – even the “first Pope”⁶ Peter!

Lazarus – I'm Coming!

The scene of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead was really odd. Rather than standing outside of the tomb and calling Lazarus to come forth, our cinematic hero walks into the tomb with Lazarus, stands behind him, and kisses him on the head (which, to be honest, I found to be more than a bit creepy). Lazarus then opens his eyes, stands up, and hugs his sister, Martha. The triumphant trio proceed to walk out to greet the cheering crowd.



Nicodemus, pay your taxes.

The account of Jesus being questioned by the Pharisees and Herodians as to whether or not Jews should pay taxes to Caesar is recorded by all three synoptic gospels. Jesus responded by calling them hypocrites.⁷ In the movie, it is Nicodemus who asks Jesus the question. Nicodemus? Really?

Omniscient? Not so much.

One of the oddities of this film is that on several occasions Hippy Jesus was surprised. He seemed to have premonitions throughout the film of future events. During his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, Hippy Jesus had a sudden and startling premonition of his coming crucifixion. It was as if up until that moment he had no idea what lay ahead of him. Nevermind that Matthew 20:17-19 records Jesus prophesying His own death specifically by crucifixion *before* His triumphal entry into Jerusalem recorded in the next chapter.⁸ Hippy Jesus had another premonition, this one interrupting the Last Supper. The meal which up to this point had been joyful and seemingly carefree was suddenly interrupted when he had a vision of Judas betraying him into the hands of the Romans. Judas then did so but did so reluctantly and only after Hippy Jesus talked him into it. His final premonition came just before His arrest. Peter assured Hippy Jesus that he would not fall away. Greatly relieved, Hippy



Jesus enthusiastically embraced him in gratitude. His relief was short-lived, however, as during the embrace he had a premonition of his upcoming denial (pictured).

The portrayal of Christ being startled by these premonitions is not only adding to Scripture what is not there, but it also strongly insinuates that He was not omniscient. This is an attack on the Second Person of the Triune God. As the God-Man, Jesus retained all attributes of His deity even though He was incarnate. All of God's attributes are essential to His nature. One of these attributes is His omniscience. To portray Jesus as lacking omniscience is to detract from the biblical doctrine of His deity. Jesus affirmed His omniscience⁹ in John 16:30-31.

Destruction of the Temple – a Bedtime Story

One of the more bizarre scenes in the movie is its portrayal of Jesus pronouncement of judgment on the Temple and its accompanying corrupt religion. In Mark 13:1-2, Jesus walked out of the Temple and prophesied that "Not one stone will be left upon another which will not be torn down." This prophecy was literally and dramatically fulfilled in AD 70 when the Romans laid waste to Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple.

In the movie, Hippie Jesus is indeed walking out of the Temple, but as he makes this pronouncement of judgment he stoops down to a smiling 4 or 5 year old little girl and playfully pokes her in her tummy. The juxtaposition of such a playful and lighthearted demeanor with what was in reality a very grave and serious pronouncement of coming judgment was truly surreal.

The Crucifixion – Robert Schuller Style

In the movie, Hippie Jesus is carrying his cross on the way to Golgatha. As he progresses, his mother, Mary, falls down beside him in anguish. Hippie Jesus says to her, "Don't be afraid. Everything is possible with God."



Not only is this event foreign to the biblical record, it greatly diminishes the meaning of the cross. Absent from the film is any mention of the heinousness and gravity of sin. Any consequences of sin are portrayed as merely horizontal with no eternal perspective. Hippie Jesus' words to Mary in this scene instantly reminded me of Robert Schuller's¹⁰ theology of Possibility Thinking. Schuller holds that the Gospel is not about receiving the imputed righteousness of Christ through

repentance and faith but rather about enhancing one's self-esteem.

Only Way to the Father? Let's Just Not Bother.

One of the distinguishing doctrines of biblical Christianity is that there is one Mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus (1 Tim. 2:5) and that there is salvation in no one else (Acts 4:12). This bedrock and non-negotiable truth is conspicuously absent from the Son of God movie.

After the resurrection but before their knowledge of it, Peter is portrayed as leading communion for the other disciples. As Peter is breaking bread and saying, “This is my body which is broken for you,” (Nope, this isn’t in the Bible either – just in case you were wondering) Hippie Jesus appears behind him and says, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” Period. Period! He conveniently and oh-so pluralistically left out the true Jesus’ immediately following words, “No man comes to the Father but by Me” (John 14:6)

There could be no legitimate reason for leaving out such a clear statement of the exclusivity of Christ other than this exclusivity is one of the chief complaints against biblical Christianity. The world says that it is not “loving” to make such exclusive claims to Truth when the biblical reality is that the most loving thing we can do is to tell people the Truth. If Mark Burnett and Roma Downey love Jesus and people as they claim, then why did they not love them enough to tell them this? Why did they not love, for example, Hindus enough to tell them that Jesus is not just another god to add to their many, but the only God through Whom they can be saved from eternal wrath? It’s not like Mark and Roma did not know the next line. They knew it. They just chose not to include it.

If you truly want to show people love, tell them the truth. If you want to show someone hatred, see that they are in error, know the truth, but say nothing about it.

Other Concerns

The above list is far, far from a comprehensive list of the biblical and theological errors of this film. The account of the woman caught in adultery, the feeding of the 5000, Jesus reading from Isaiah 61, His instruction to “Turn the other cheek,” His statement regarding John the Baptist, the (partial) quotation of John 3:16, etc., etc. were all riddled with errors. There was literally not a single scene in the entire production that was without glaring issues. Some will say that there is nothing wrong with taking artistic license in making a movie. I would agree with that – depending upon the subject matter.

The Psalmist, David, says of God, “You have exalted above all things Your Name and Your Word” (138:2, ESV). God has exalted His Name and His Word not above some things or many things - above *all things*. It is simply not possible to overstate how seriously He takes them. If someone wants to make a modern rendition of say, John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath* or Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick* or any other work of secular literature, hey, I’m good with that. Knock yourself out.

But that is not the case here. The subject matter here is God’s full revelation of Himself to us, the God-Man Jesus Christ. The Alpha and Omega. The only Creator and Savior. Dear ones, we are not at liberty to take artistic (and theological) license with such things. They are too sacred. Too holy.

Let’s suppose, for the sake of argument, that this movie had been produced not by New Age Roman Catholics¹¹ but rather by Bible-believing Christians and that the man playing the role of Jesus was the very best actor with the very best of intentions. Let’s further suppose that we were to go see this movie in the theater and have Jesus Christ Himself walk in and occupy the seat next to us. I cannot imagine a scenario in which after the closing credits rolled and the lights came back on that the real Jesus would

say, “You know, *that* guy got it right. He did real justice to Me, truly understands what I experienced, and accurately portrayed Me to a watching world.” Can you?

It’s a Small World After All

Even if you’ve never been to Disney World, chances are you know the theme song to one of the park’s most well known and beloved attractions, “It’s A Small World.” Chances are that simply by reading the above heading you have the song playing in your mind right now. It is one of those songs that, once stuck in your head, is notoriously and irritatingly hard to get out. Media is powerful.

One of the great dangers of this film is that for those who go into it thinking that they are about to view an accurate portrayal of the Son of God (this is, after all, how many evangelical celebrities have described it), for many of them, what they see becomes their picture of Christ. For them Hippy Jesus is how they picture the real Jesus. This is tragic and has, potentially, eternal consequences.

I tell people often in my preaching and teaching that it is not enough to believe in Jesus. Jehovah’s Witnesses believe in Jesus. Mormons believe in Jesus. Even Muslims believe in Jesus. The problem, though, is that they do not believe in the *right* Jesus. We must believe in the right Jesus. We must believe in the Jesus of the *Bible*. We must trust in the finished work of the real Jesus on the cross and repent from sins in order to have the righteous wrath of God removed from and the righteousness of the risen Christ imputed to our accounts. The Son of God film creates in our minds a different Jesus than the Jesus of the Bible. It creates an image of a false god in our minds and, therefore, is perilously close to – if not outright – violating the second commandment (Exodus 20:4-6). If we trust in a different Jesus then we are trusting in a different gospel and a different gospel does not save (Gal 1:6-9).

Concluding Thoughts

Mark Burnett and Roma Downey claim that they desired to make a movie honoring the Son of God but by distorting His character, taking Him out of context, and omitting His claims of exclusivity they have not honored Him at all; they have denied Him. Let’s keep in mind, though, that Burnett and Downey are New Age Roman Catholics and, as such, are not regenerate. Their minds have been blinded by the god of this age (2 Cor. 4:4). They cannot see what they cannot see. God must reveal the Truth to them. Let us pray for their genuine conversion.

What is more troubling to me than the movie itself is that evangelical leaders who claim to believe in the authority and sufficiency of Scripture have so heartily endorsed it. That Word-Faith preachers such as T.D. Jakes, Joel Osteen, and Paula White endorse it should be no surprise. Though it certainly does not surprise me that Rick Warren endorsed it, he at least claims to be a preacher of the true Gospel.¹² Rick Warren went so far as to say of the film, “Skip church and go see it. It is that important.”¹³ Other notable “evangelicals” to praise the film include Andy Stanley, Bill Hybels, Max Lucado, Lamb and Lion Ministries and the American Family Association. These men, at least in



theory, should know better. It is quite telling just how far the professing church – let alone society in general – has slid in its biblical literacy. The theological bar has been so lowered for so long now that very few Christians see any problem with this movie whatsoever. Many will undoubtedly read this article and think I am pharisaical for caring about the need for biblical fidelity. I am not making an evaluation one way or the other about the sincerity of those who endorse it. Sincerity, though, is not the issue. Truth is the issue.

About halfway through the film I began to wonder what my reaction would be if this had been a movie about my wife. I began to wonder what my reaction would be if Kathy was the main character and she was misrepresented and her words distorted. I would not have stood for it. I would not have just remained silent. Why, then, would I remain silent given that it was not my wife but my *Savior* being disparaged on the silver screen for the consumption of the undiscerning masses? And so, I did not.

When the movie came to its merciful end and the lights came on, I stood up and turned to face the crowd (I was sitting at the front and so everyone was behind me). I said, “Ladies and gentlemen, may I please have your attention?” Every head in the theater turned and people stared at me. I went on to explain to them that they just saw a movie in which Jesus was grossly misrepresented and His teachings twisted beyond recognition. I said, “Please do not think that you just saw the Jesus of the Bible in this movie because you did not. What you just saw was a different Jesus with a different gospel.” I went on to present the true Gospel to them. I talked about sin, the wrath of God and the absolute necessity for genuine repentance. I said that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. I ended by saying, “Please do not think you will find the true Jesus in this movie or any other movie. If you want to know the true Jesus, please, please go home and read your Bibles. There and only there will you find Him.”

I guess I spoke for 3-4 minutes or so. I noticed that as I spoke the vast majority of people looked like deer in headlights just watching me in stunned silence. A few, though, were nodding their heads in agreement. For just a few it seemed that what I was saying was resonating with their hearts and minds.

I relate this to you not to lift myself up as some courageous Christian. Not at all. I only did what I was supposed to do. My conscience was so violated by this film that for me to do anything less would have been sin. I did it because it was right thing to do. James 4:17 states, “Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.” Any decent husband would have defended his wife and so why would we not likewise defend our Savior?

This movie, like its theatrical predecessor of a decade ago, is being billed as one of the greatest evangelistic tools of all time. Dear friends, I would submit to you that it is the Word of God empowered by God’s Holy Spirit that is the greatest evangelistic tool of all time. Movies such as this undoubtedly move us and tug on our heart strings but they are the theological equivalent of a sugar rush. They give us a brief emotional high but then leave us to come crashing back down.

Recall the account in Luke 16 of the rich man languishing in the place of torment begging Father Abraham to send Lazarus to warn his five brothers back on earth not to come to this place. Abraham responded, “They have Moses and the prophets. Let them hear them.” The rich man retorted, “No,

Father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, then they will believe!” Abraham said, “If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.” In other words, if the rich man’s brothers will not respond to the written authoritative Word of God, they will not respond even if someone were to come to them from the dead.

This movie is, in my estimation, a reflection of the pitiful state to which we as professing believers have slid. We seem to yearn for Hollywood to somehow validate our theology and values. It’s as if we are saying to the world, “See, Jesus really is cool and we really aren’t kooks! See how popular these films are?” We are like the kid on the playground who nobody wants on his team but desperately desires to be included. Pitiful. Why do we need validation from a lost world and depraved culture that is warring against God? We are the redeemed of the Most High God empowered by His Holy Spirit. Why is it that we seem to get so excited and worked up over a theologically and biblically inept Hollywood production when we have the Alpha and Omega as our Head?

There is an inherent power in the word of God – the Bible – that is found nowhere else. Not in movies, not in passion plays, not in skits, and certainly not in church services which pander to the supposed “felt needs” of the lost. We have traded in the big guns of Scripture for the spitballs of visual entertainment. The Apostle Paul said, “For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (Rom. 1:16). If you truly want to see the power of God unleashed, take the Gospel as it is read in and preached from the Bible out to a lost world and trust the Holy Spirit to convict of sin, righteousness, and judgment. Trust Him to bring life to the spiritually dead. That, dear ones, is the power of God.

¹ **Son of God: The Life of Jesus in You Member Book** by New York Times bestselling author Rick Warren challenges you to consider what would happen if you applied the lessons from events in Jesus’ life - temptation, suffering, death, resurrection—to your own? Would you come to know Him more intimately and with a greater understanding of your purpose? Would you embody more completely the mission, love, and mind of Jesus? This DVD small group study, based on producers Mark Burnett and Roma Downey’s major theatrical release, **Son of God**, features Pastor Rick Warren as he explains how you can find your purpose in studying the life of Jesus. Source: <http://www.lifeway.com/Product/son-of-god-the-life-of-jesus-in-you-member-book-P005683780>

² See Matthew 4:18-22.

³ For excellent resources on the Roman Catholic Church and its false gospel, I highly commend to you Mike Gendron. Mike was a Roman Catholic well into adulthood before God graciously saved him out of the Romish deception. His ministry is largely geared toward speaking the truth in love to Roman Catholics so that, by God’s grace, they come to a knowledge of the true Gospel. Mike is a personal friend of mine and is one of the most humble, gentle-spirited men I’ve had the pleasure of knowing. His ministry website is www.proclaimingthegospel.org

⁴ T.D. Jakes is well-known for his Oneness theology, also known as modalism. Modalism is the belief that God changes “modes” from God the Father to God the Son to God the Holy Spirit but does not exist as all three Persons simultaneously. According to his Belief Statement, “There is one God, Creator of all things, infinitely perfect, and

eternally existing in three manifestations: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” Source:

<http://www.thepottershouse.org/Local/About-Us/Belief-Statement.aspx> Note the use of the word

“manifestations” rather than “Persons.” Describing God as three “manifestations” is modalistic terminology. Jakes may try to disguise his anti-Trinitarian theology, but he has never clearly and unambiguously renounced it.

⁵ Source: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KDIwY_Nv5t4

⁶ Tongue solidly in cheek here. Roman Catholics, of course, believe Peter to be the first Pope.

⁷ See Matthew 22:18.

⁸ Jesus *repeatedly* prophesied His own death. See Matthew 26:1-2; Mark 8:31-33; 9:30-32; Luke 9:22-27; 18:31-34. He alluded to it in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16 and several times in John’s gospel between chapters 13-17.

⁹ Some take Jesus’ statement in Matthew 24:36 as an indication that while incarnate He did not possess omniscience. Caution should be taken here, however, as such a position would contradict Jesus’ affirmation of His omniscience in John 16:30-31. A full treatment of this statement is far beyond the scope of this work, but suffice it to say that rather than Jesus not possessing omniscience, He, on occasion, voluntarily emptied Himself of His divine prerogative simply to *exercise* some of His attributes.

¹⁰ Dr. Robert Schuller is the former pastor of the Crystal Cathedral and is author of the book *Self esteem: The New Reformation* (Word Publishing, 1982). Schuller states, “Sin is any act or thought that robs myself or another human being of his or her self esteem.” Pg. 14. In 2003 I was watching Robert Schuller on his weekly television program, “Hour of Power,” and heard him say, “When Jesus was on the cross, He lost His self-esteem.”

¹¹ Roma Downey says, “I see such beauty in my faith, you know, I just have a great love and belief in the Lord. I see God in everyone and in everything. When I’m looking for inspiration myself, I probably find it most in nature... . The language of God is in the silence, perhaps. From a very young age through my education, but really through my father’s guidance, [I was] encouraged to listen to what he called your ‘God voice,’ which is the still quiet voice inside of yourself that you know what’s the right thing to do, you know what’s the right thing to say. And I’ve always tried to be guided by it.” Interview with the Washington Post on February 9, 2012.

¹² An entire book could be written on Rick Warren’s long history of ecumenism and biblical compromise. Warren is a theological chameleon. He is whoever his audience is on that particular occasion. When he is with Word-Faith preachers he is charismatic and Word-Faith. When he is with men like John Piper he is theologically reformed and reading the Puritans. When he is reaching out to Muslims he signs the Yale Document which strongly insinuates that Allah and Yahweh are the same God.

¹³ Promotional video for “Son of God” movie. Source: <http://www.sonofgodmovie.com/home.html#videos.html>

Warren’s comments come at the 02:56 mark. The picture is a screenshot of this video.